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ABSTRACT

This manual for parents provides guidelines for administering parent cooperative preschools (coops) and orienting coopmembers to their multiple roles within the school. It deals with the organizational structure of parent cooperative groups, the roles of parents and teachers, the mechanics of leadership, purposes and methods of parent education, and policies and procedures for running a business (including teacher hiring and evaluation, recordkeeping, budget preparation, fund raising, and long range planning). Five appendices provide simplified rules of order, a sample teacher application, a sample director contract, a list of suggested readings, and a description of "real life solutions" to problems presented for discussion in the text. (GO)

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SHARING RESPONSIBILITIES SHARING RESOURCES

A Philosophical and Practical Approach to the Administration of Parent Cooperatives and Other Programs Involving Parents

by Roberta L. Bergman

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Roberta L. Bergman

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PREFACE

The Northeast Ohio Council of Cooperative Preschools is proud to be a part of bringing Sharing Responsibilities, Sharing Resources into print. During the past two years the Council has sponsored "Leadership Seminars" which were conducted for its member schools by Roberta Bergman, Early Childhood Consultant at the Center for Human Services. We have had many requests from those who attended the seminars and from those who were unable to attend to put the material presented into a permanent form. There are many publications about parent cooperatives and how to organize them; however, there is very little in cooperative literature about how to keep them going!

A parent cooperative is a complex social-educational organization. Parents who enroll their children in a cooperative are members of a group whose goal is to provide an early childhood program for their children. The parents share in the administration of the program and hire professionals to carry out the educational philosophy. The parents are then supervised in the classroom by their employees. Many of the problems encountered in these groups are related to the fact that the membership and the administration of the school changes yearly, thus there is a constant need for education and orientation.

This manual is intended to provide guidelines for administering parent cooperatives as well as to serve as a tool for orienting members to their multiple roles within the schools. It is basic to cooperatives, but it also has broader applications for Federally-mandated parent policy boards, community schools or for anyone who belongs to any group: how to chair meetings, how to function as a member of a board, how to work with professional persons to achieve a common goal, etc. We invite you to read and then discuss

this material with the other members of your group.

Our special thanks to Roberta Bergman for sharing her knowledge and enthusiasm for and about cooperatives with the 39 member schools of the Northeast Ohio Council of Cooperative Preschools and to the Center for Human Services for responding to our request to publish this material.

Virginia Wade
Chairman, Northeast Ohio Council
of Cooperative Preschools

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To anyone who has ever read or heard the "lore" of parent cooperatives, some of the material in this book may seem familiar. Except in certain instances, I have not attempted to cite references either because the origins of the material have become obscured or because the material has been synthesized into a new form. Nonetheless, I gratefully acknowledge the following individuals and organizations from whom I have learned some of the specifics of parent cooperatives:

Terry Beresford, Consultant to the Maryland Council of Parent Participation Nursery Schools, Inc.

Howard Bergman, former co-op president and participating parent.

Barbara Cantor, former parent education chairman, Montgomery County Council of Cooperative Nursery Schools, current editor of the PCPI Journal.

Kensington (Maryland) Nursery School, Inc.

The Maryland Council of Parent Participation Nursery Schools, Inc., formerly the Montgomery County Council of Cooperative Nursery Schools.

The Northeast Ohio Council of Cooperative Preschools.

Parent Cooperative Preschools International (PCPI).

I deeply appreciate the efforts of Virginia Wade, chairman of the Northeast Ohio Council of Cooperative Preschools--her unflagging commitment to the publication of this manuscript and her worthy suggestions as to its content and style.

To my colleagues at the Center for Human Services I offer my gratitude

for their encouragement and assistance:

Juanita Dalton, Assistant Director of the Center for Human Services

Janet Bernon, Director of the Center's Community Consultation Service

Ruth Thompson, Consultant

Dorothy Hollis, Secretary

Finally, I hope the readers will accept my use of the pronouns "she" and "her" to refer to the teacher and the parent. These references in no way reflect personal doubts as to the value of male participation in preschool programs but are used merely to represent the most frequent and familiar situations.

Roberta L. Bergman

October, 1975

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WHAT IS A PARENT COOPERATIVE?

Perhaps you have your own ideas of what a parent cooperative (co-op) is, but let's agree on a single definition. The broadest definition is that it's an independent institution organized and administered by parents for their children. It may be a nursery school, a child care center, or even an elementary school. The parents own the school within the limits of state incorporation laws, have administrative responsibility for its operation and participate in the education of their children under the professional teachers whom they hire. Responsibility for the administrative operation of the school is delegated by the entire membership to an elected executive board which generally includes the president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer. In addition, several committees are charged with specific responsibilities for equipment, membership, fund-raising, housekeeping, etc. Some of these committee chairmen may also serve on the board. That is a true co-op. There are many variations on this model ranging from church and school system sponsored preschools in which the parents participate but do not make policy to full day child care centers in which the parents make policy but do not participate.

Your commitment to a cooperative venture will evolve from three levels. The fundamental level will be your <u>active concern as a parent</u>--concern for your child's adjustment to school, his relationship with his peers, his responses to the curriculum, etc. The second level will be your <u>position as a teacher assistant</u>--your knowledge of classroom routines and methods, your experiences with children other than your own, your assessment of the effectiveness of the classroom program. The third level will be your <u>involvement as an administrator</u>--

your specific assignment on the board or on a committee, your voice in the decision-making for the whole school, and your input on issues that may have effects on other children in your community.

The reason that a true co-op offers so much to you on each of those levels is that you are your child's first and primary teacher, and that's no small job. Your active involvement in administering a program, your contact with trained teachers, and your chance to become familiar with appropriate equipment and materials are part of a learning experience which helps you in your role as a teacher of your child. Also, and this is most important, as a parent you are entitled to control of your own child, and you can exercise this control when you decide what the philosophy of the school will be, who the staff will be, and what kinds of classes will be offered. There are few such opportunities in programs which are administered by boards that include some parents or that are elected by parents but which do not really allow for total control by parents. If you've read anything about Federally-funded projects like Head Start or certain other early childhood programs, you'll have noticed that they all stress parent involvement. That's the "new" word. It sometimes sounds like the Federal government discovered parents, but you can be proud that co-ops as described have existed for 60 years.

Co-ops also offer social support--the chance for you to meet and work with other families in the community and to grow in understanding of how groups function toward common goals. If what you read in this guide makes sense to you, then your co-op will offer you a valuable as well as an enjoyable experience.

ROLES IN THE COOPERATIVE

The Role of the Board

The role of the board may differ from school to school. Your school's by-laws should spell out as clearly as possible what your school sees as the board's role and what the specific duties are of each board member. Generally, the board has administrative responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the school. This responsibility is delegated to it by the membership through the by-laws. The board implements policies set by the membership and recommends new policies where appropriate. This means that the board can make non-policy decisions such as when meetings will be held, where to purchase juice, what kind of mop to buy, and so on. Any decision on educational philosophy, on membership requirements, tuition fees, and budget should be made by the membership because these are policy decisions.

Usually, most of what is covered in the by-laws is policy. The board can and should recommend changes in policy based on its on-going experience with the school, but the membership must vote on whatever policy is proposed. It is the board's responsibility to hire the teachers and to evaluate them, but the board does so within the framework of the educational policies set by the membership.

The Role of the Membership

The most vital role of the membership as a whole is to make policy. There are no hard and fast rules that can be applied to all schools as to what constitutes good policy. Generally, some mix of common sense and innovation should prevail along with adequate consideration of the long-term as well as the short run effects of the policy.

How does the membership set policy? Almost every school has some broad statement written in its by-laws by the founders of the school (or revised by later members) which defines its purposes. That statement expresses an educational philosophy from which specific policy decisions, including the adoption of a budget, should follow.

In theory, this broad statement allows the membership considerable leeway from year to year to change specific policies as new knowledge about young children, curriculum, materials, etc. emerges. In practice, a broad philosophical statement is frequently ignored by the membership since nobody is quite sure what it means, or else everyone assumes that whatever occurs within the classroom is consistent with that philosophy. For instance, a typical statement of philosophy might read like this:

> "ABCooperative is organized to promote each child's physical, intellectual, social and emotional growth through a variety of individual and group activities."
>
> or
>
> "ABCooperative believes in the worth of each child, and gears its program to help each child develop at his own pace."

Under the leadership of the board, a school should periodically review its statement of philosophy and consider to what extent the educational policies set by previous members or proposed by current members reflect this philosophy. Just what are these educational policies? Educational policies are those decisions which affect either directly or indirectly what happens to the child in the classroom. Educational policies include the following:

class size
adult:child ratios
grouping of children
schedule of classes
staff qualifications

selection of equipment and materials
setting of goals and expectations for the children
choosing formal or informal modes of instruction

A school whose philosophy stresses the importance of individual attention being paid to each child yet schedules only one parent each day to assist a teacher with twenty children is not translating that philosophy into policy. Similarly, a membership that sets as a goal for its children that every child will be able to write his own name by the end of the school year is paying only lip service to its philosophy of children progressing at their own rates.

As schools review their statements of philosophy in light of specific policies, they may find such inconsistencies. When these occur, it's time for the membership to decide whether the philosophy should be changed or some policies should be revised. Open discussions which lead to consensus among the members are vital to the formulating of new philosophies and policies. In attempting to evaluate and re-work its educational policies, a school should refer to current literature on early childhood education such as that suggested on page 75.

The Role of Each Parent

As an individual, each parent's role is to assist the teacher. Her assistance may take the form of wiping up paint, reading a story, comforting a crying child, or (the all-time favorite) scrubbing the toilets. She needs to be trained for her role by the teacher and the participation or orientation chairman. This means that she needs to know where things are, what the routines are, and how to interact with children within a classroom setting. Although the teacher will want to handle most "problems,"

situations will arise when the parent must act, and so she needs to know how to handle tantrums and fights.

Another dimension of her role is active observer. She should be encouraged to observe the children and to ask questions about child development and early childhood education, since she can learn much from being in a situation in which she can watch a teacher work with children. She can share some of her observations and relate classroom anecdotes both to the teachers and the other members. However, the parent has to make a distinction between sharing observations or anecdotes and talking about the children or their families in or outside of the classroom. In other words, she must respect confidences. As a learner/observer, she should also try to keep herself informed about what is happening in the field of early childhood education.

Another role that you seldom think about, but is important, is to be a spokesman for your school in the community. Each of your members should be singing the school's praises to the community because she is proud of the way it's run and the role she plays in it. If you think about the schools and people you know, who is it in a school that tells her friends and neighbors about it? It's not just the mother who likes her child's teacher--it's the president of the school or the chairman of the spring bazaar or the newsletter editor. In other words the <u>best public relations people are those who are involved</u>. Co-ops have one great advantage over other educational institutions--people come to them voluntarily. If they're enthusiastic to begin with, if they know what's expected of them, and they're given a chance to do it, there's no reason why co-oping will not be a tremendous experience for them that they will re-pay by promoting the school. A good co-op with

good parent involvement can survive a lot of problems (including teacher turnover) and can come out stronger.

The Role of the Teacher

The role of the teacher is very complex because in order for her program to be effective, she has to supervise her own employers when they assist her in the classroom. Her teaching responsibility does not end with the children. Instead, she must be able to explain the theory and practice of her program and share her knowledge of children with the parents. Ideally, she should be able to spend some time with the participating parents at the end of every class to review the day's events, to answer questions, and to point out where she or a parent might have responded more effectively to a child. She should be available at meetings and by phone to advise the board and membership when they have questions that require her expertise, but she should not force her expertise on them.

She is responsible for the day-to-day programming in the school. Once she is hired and once she is given a budget to work within, she makes the decisions about what story will be read today, what field trips will be taken, and what brand of crayons should be purchased. Ordinarily she does not make decisions about who will be accepted into the school. She may be part of the membership interview process and she may meet with a child before he is enrolled, but unless the child presents a gross problem that she feels unable to cope with, she should not make membership decisions. However, once a child is in her class and she finds that he should be withdrawn, he should be withdrawn. If the board feels that a child should be withdrawn but the teacher wishes to retain him, you should retain him. In other words, defer to her professional

knowledge of children. If you have reason to doubt her professional knowledge, you should not continue to employ her. By the way, this does not apply to decisions to drop or keep a parent who is not abiding by school policies. That decision is the board's alone.

The teacher is not a board member and does not have a vote. She should be asked to present recommendations or to share her opinion, but this is at the discretion of the board. Generally, her participation will be limited to matters concerning what occurs in the classroom and whatever administrative details relate to her. Her ability to impart her professional knowledge informally to the board members as those matters are discussed enhances her contribution to them; indeed, having more access to the teacher's knowledge may prove to be an incentive to potential board members.

The teacher should not be involved in board business such as planning social events, determining fees, setting membership requirements, etc. since when she has input in everything, it tends to increase the board's dependence on her. You may want to schedule all the business that involves the teacher on one part of the agenda so that she'll be free to leave the meeting when that part of the agenda is finished. Frequently, teachers don't care to stay for the whole board meeting--if they insist on doing so, it could mean that they don't trust the board to make wise decisions, or that they think the board will talk about them behind their backs.

The terms "teacher" and "director" can be used interchangeably throughout this text, although there are some differences. In a school that has a designated director, she is responsible for the educational programming for the whole school, not just for the class she teaches. Most directors are willing to give individual teachers freedom in what they do in the class--it makes for happier teachers,

but the director has ultimate responsibility. In some schools with large staffs, the director represents the total staff at board meetings or in conferences with the president.

The director should sit in on the interviewing of new teachers, although the parents make the final choice. Obviously, though, if the director rejects a particular applicant that you wish to hire, it's pointless to hire that person unless you're prepared to hire a new director, too. And that sometimes happens.

It's wisest, in order to maintain the channels of communication, that when a parent has a question or minor complaint concerning a teacher, she takes it up with the teacher. This is particularly true when it concerns that parent's child or some specific event that has occurred in the classroom. The director should be kept informed, preferably by the teacher, of any of these types of parent-teacher communication.

If, however, a parent or a group of parents have significant criticisms or basic questions about a teacher's performance, they should be brought through the board to the director who, as the teacher's supervisor, is responsible for helping her improve her performance. Depending on what the issue is, the director and teacher can solve it together, or the teacher may need to meet with the parents herself.

Here are real life examples your board could discuss. The real life solutions are in Appendix B on page 68.

1. A parent observed the teacher counting heads in the classroom by boys and girls and thought it promoted sexist attitudes. With whom did she discuss it?

2. Several parents were concerned that medication a teacher was taking was affecting her personality. With whom did they discuss it?

3. A few parents believed that the teacher was not doing enough with science in the classroom. With whom did they talk?

4. Two parents were unhappy that their children were fighting each other every day. With whom did they talk?

POWER TO THE PEOPLE!

While this title sounds like something that might come out of some militant organization, it actually relates to how people work together within their roles. You probably have heard it said that information is power. If you really view your co-op as a dynamic, democratic group which has a meaningful and responsible function in the community (and that's how you should see it), then it's necessary that all of the members are informed of all they need to know.

Information begins with the first contact when you tell a prospective member what's required of her, and it continues through orientation when you inform her of what she needs to know to be able to work effectively. Then it goes on through the year--not via the grapevine which can be very destructive since only those with access to the grapevine have access to the power--but through meetings, through the regular distribution of newsletters, and through notices posted on the bulletin board.

Nearly every school has a bulletin board for parents. The typical bulletin board is full of yellowed, curling pieces of paper which, at best, describe fire safety procedures or how to make yarn balls, and, at worst, announce the potluck supper to be held November 6, 1972, or offer a vivid description of some obscure disease of the big toe. Needless to say, nobody ever reads what's on that bulletin board, and it quickly becomes an eyesore. Somebody in your school, perhaps the secretary or parent education chairman, should be responsible for the bulletin board to see that the items on it are current, that they're changed frequently, and that the bulletin board is attractive to the eye--not so it will win neatness awards but so people will stop to look at it and read what they need to know. Make

it colorful, tack up some cartoons that are apropos of nursery school or some photos of the children to attract attention. A small thing like keeping up the bulletin board shows the members that someone is willing to put in a little effort to keep them informed.

An interesting aspect of power is that in a co-op, the perception of power is different, depending on with whom you talk, and this is true on several levels. The membership views the board as very powerful. The board feels it must be responsive to the membership which holds the power. The teacher feels that the board is powerful....after all, the parents on the board are her employers and if any parents complain or withdraw their children, that could mean her job. The board, on the other hand, sees the teacher as very powerful, and it's their duty to try to keep her happy or she might resign. An individual parent also sees the teacher as powerful--she's the professional, the person who "does it right," the person who might be indifferent to my child if she doesn't like me. The same parent feels powerless herself since while the parents have power, the power of the parents is spread over the entire membership. Even the president can feel powerless.

The differences in the perception of power are interesting to look at... ...and nearly impossible to overcome. It's not important to overcome them, but it is important to keep them in mind when you're dealing with all of the currents in a co-op.

There are some other areas of difference which affect the way people behave in a co-op:

--Responsibility. The teacher is primarily responsible for the education and socialization of the children in the classroom; the parents are primarily

responsible for the administration of the school.

--Professional image. The teacher has one; the parents (including the president, who is directing the administration of an educational institution) have the burden of serving as professionals while everyone knows they're "merely" volunteers. At the end of a bad day, a teacher can say to herself, "Well, that could happen to any teacher," and she goes home and immerses herself in a hot tub and a cold drink. But the president tends to immerse herself in a barrel of self-criticisms or recriminations or both. If something went wrong within the parent group, she's apt to hear about it all day, all evening, all week, and maybe all month. If she has a bad day with her own child, she begins to worry that she's an inadequate mother whose child will become a delinquent because she's devoting too much time to the cooperative's business and not enough time to him.

--Objectives. The teacher has long-range, developmental objectives both for the children and the parents. The parents have immediate, operational objectives both for the children and the school. In other words, the teacher is willing to put in time, wait for signs of readiness, work slowly and build on what has gone before, both in the classroom and in the parent education program. The parents, on the other hand, are concerned with getting Johnny to stop hitting Billy immediately, or they're worried about how the school's budget will allow for a new mimeograph machine before the next newsletter is due to be published.

--Accountability. The teacher is accountable to the membership through the board. She has to answer to them, and she knows it. Her job description will state that. The parents as a group are accountable to themselves, and while an individual parent may receive pressure to perform

from the rest of the parent group, the teacher tends to see the parent group as protective of its own. Also, the teacher who has a difficult time coping with a troublesome child feels that all of the parents see her lack of success and think she's incompetent, while the parent of that child is almost never criticized. After all, everyone in a co-op has opened her parenting skills to scrutiny, so who among the parents will cast the first stone?

Again, what's important is not that you try to resolve these differences in perception, but rather that you understand them. It'll make your job much easier not only when it comes to communicating with the teacher but also in dealing with the membership in general. Try to look at things not just from your viewpoint, but from the other person's also. Two people can see the same thing and perceive it very differently. So maybe the expression should be not "what you <u>see</u> is what you get," but "what you perceive is what you get."

THE MECHANICS OF LEADERSHIP

Being a leader in deed as well as in name requires advance thought and preparation. Tasks such as planning and chairing meetings, assigning responsibilities, coping with conflict, and any other tasks which you face can be managed. Think of these tasks as goals to be met, and then develop plans to achieve them.

A Plan for the Board

Well before school starts, a meeting should be scheduled of both the immediate past and newly elected boards. At this meeting you can discuss the role of the board as it is defined in the by-laws. This should help each new board member to understand both the scope and the limits of the board's responsibilities. Each board member also should be oriented toward her own specific job. It's helpful for each immediate past board member to explain the details of her job to her successor. Files, minutes, records, etc. can be handed to the appropriate persons.

As with any orientation, questions must be invited. What is important is not that you have all the answers, but that you can mobilize the board to begin to find answers together.

All subsequent board meetings with rare exceptions should be open to all members. The exceptions to that might be where the possibility of firing a teacher would be discussed. And the reason for keeping the board meeting closed to non-board members is not to keep information from them but to protect the teacher. It's not fair to her to have her performance discussed before a crowd, and if the decision is made not to fire her, the fact that it was considered should not be broadcast since it could affect the way in which the

parents work with her.

Otherwise, announcements of board meetings should be posted with the agenda listed. Of course, only board members can vote, but depending on the size of the group and the time available, it's permissible to allow observers to enter the discussion. It's useful for new parents to attend board meetings so that they'll begin to see how the board functions with an eye toward next year. Changing the entire board from year to year tends to impede its initial action, but you do want some new people on the board, not only to get their ideas but also to make it possible for new people to feel that they can have a voice in the school.

It's a good idea, since the board is usually a small group, to conduct the meetings informally with a minimum of parliamentary procedures. However, if controversy arises or if the board members feel they would be more comfortable with the consistent application of formal procedures, it's important to use them. A set of simplified rules of order appears as Appendix A on page 66. You do want to promote a friendly feeling, though, and meeting in someone's home helps that.

The size of the board should be limited simply because it's not necessary to have half the school conducting its business. The board should consist of the officers, the delegate to the local council of co-operatives, and a few key committee chairmen. The social chairman does not need to be a board member, but the ways and means chairman does.

Board and committee positions should be filled by people who have indicated an interest or ability in them since they'll have some motivation to begin with. In filling board and committee jobs, if you're going to assign the responsibility to do a job, you need to delegate the authority to get it

done. In other words, the cookie chairman should not have to call the president to get permission to purchase Ritz crackers instead of Graham crackers.

Board members are responsible for carrying out their individual board tasks and for contributing in general to the functioning of the school. Before every board meeting, each board member should have a copy of the agenda so she can prepare her report. She should report on what she has been doing and should bring any questions or new ideas before the rest of the board. She should be able to answer questions concerning her job and be prepared to act by the next meeting on what is suggested that affects her.

The board is the official channel through which the staff and membership communicate on matters of educational policy. Once the board has hired a teacher or has decided to renew her contract, that person is entitled to the support and confidence of the board. The board's representative (usually the president) and each staff member should meet on a regular basis--perhaps monthly, without any children present to distract them--to evaluate the school program, to exchange ideas as to how each can help the other, and to interpret parent feedback that comes to any of them. These regular meetings do a lot to relieve anxiety on both the president and staff's part since they all have a forum in which to bring up concerns without waiting for some crisis to occur.

If conflicts between a teacher and the membership should arise, it is the board's job to try to resolve them. It's unfortunate if the board feels that the solution to a conflict lies in firing a teacher, but once a group of parents has lost confidence in a teacher, a change in staff is usually the best solution. What both sides have to realize is that parents are apt to be less than objective where they feel the welfare of their children is concerned

and that a teacher is likely to become defensive when she is outnumbered by a group of unhappy parents. Since in a co-op what occurs is a result of sharing between parents and teachers, no teacher should be forced to leave feeling that she has failed unless she's truly incompetent, in which case the board bears responsibility for having hired her in the first place.

On Being a Chairman, Chairwoman, Chairperson, etc.

Let's start with simple things....like how to conduct a meeting.

--Have an agenda prepared and posted and/or distributed ahead of time. This tells everybody why they should be at the meeting and what they're going to hear. As you've already read and will continue to read, people function best when they know what's expected of them. This is true of Mary Brown when she comes to school to help on Tuesday morning and also when she comes to a meeting on Thursday night. The agenda should be written so that it tells people what they're expected to do as per this sample:

AGENDA
Membership Meeting
March 21

1. Discussion and vote on changing our name from "The Original Parent Cooperative Nursery School of the Upper Southwest Cuyahoga Valley Township" to "The Co-op."
2. Discussion and vote on adopting a Montessori curriculum. Please have read and bring your copy of "Montessori and the Energy Crisis."
3. Discussion of plans for the school picnic.
4. Selection of rain dates for picnic. If you have any of the following, please bring them: a copy of The Farmer's Almanac, a wall calendar, some darts.
5. New business from the floor.
6. Adjournment.

--Start the meeting on time, even if only one other person is there. When

people find out you start at 8:00 p.m. they'll be there at 8:00 p.m. End on time, too, even if the business is not finished. If necessary, schedule another meeting to finish the business, or better, postpone the business to the next scheduled meeting. There's no reason for a meeting to go on until midnight or even 11:00 p.m. when you've started at 8:00 p.m.

--Decide on a structure. If you do this, you'll probably be able to cover all of the items on the agenda without leaving any unfinished business. The structure includes: how much time will be allotted to discussions of certain topics, what will be voted on or merely discussed (you will already have proposed this on the agenda), how the voting will be done (by ballot, roll call, show of hands, etc.). As chairman you should propose the structure, but allow the group to change it if they feel it is necessary.

--Ready to take up the agenda? Begin with the most stimulating item first. It gets the meeting going and insures that you cover important topics. It also encourages people to come on time. You present the first issue giving a brief background or explanation of what the question is. Make sure that everyone understands. "At our last board meeting, the board voted to recommend a tuition raise of $25 per month. This is because our rent for next year will increase by $50 per month, and we wish to raise our teachers' salaries by $40 per month each." Invite discussion. Your role is to make sure that all viewpoints are represented and that the discussion goes smoothly. You cannot use the chair to state your own opinions nor can you vote, except to break a tie. However, if the voting is so close on a major issue that a tie develops, your group is really not ready to make a decision that represents the wishes of the majority of the group. You're far better off to "agree to disagree" pending further study and/or discussion.

If you feel strongly about a particular issue (such as the board has voted to expel your child) and you wish to speak or vote, you must relinquish the chair for that particular issue, or for the entire meeting if there are a number of issues.

Here are some pointers on chairing a discussion*:

1. When someone makes a contribution, as chairman you should be encouraging (nod or smile) but don't take the group's time to talk about the contribution. You can welcome the contribution without judging the idea... it takes too much time to say "that's a good idea" after every contribution and besides, it's not the chairman's job to judge the idea.

2. Make sure that all ideas are clearly understood..."Could you explain more fully what you mean?" "Is what you are saying....?" If an idea presented is incomplete, try to hold the attention of the group while the idea is developed more fully. "Let's stay with Tom's point for a minute" or "Maybe there's more to be said on that point."

3. Help separate two or more ideas that might be included in one contribution. "Are you saying two different things--that you're in favor of raising the teachers' salaries but you're opposed to a tuition increase?"

4. Exclude an irrelevant idea without discouraging the member who contributed it. "Buying two new tricycles is something we'll have to talk about soon, but we'll have to sidestep that for now, or we'll never cover our agenda."

5. Avoid repetition. "Is this another example of the point that Sue made? Is there anything different to add or are we ready to vote?"

6. Get a variety of contributions so that one or two members don't dominate. "What do some of the rest of you think?" or call on someone: "Anne, we haven't heard your ideas." Watch for signs of silent participation (nodding or shaking head), and when you see them from someone who hasn't spoken up say, "Louise, you seem to agree with that."

7. When you encounter pauses in the discussion (dead silence), try to decide whether the pauses are productive or nonproductive. Many times a group needs some time to think. Often a very quiet member who thinks well but finds verbalization difficult needs some silence in order to speak without competing with more verbal members. If the pause seems to be productive, do

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*Adapted from Reaching Parents: Effective Discussions, Parent Cooperative Preschools International, 1973.

nothing. If it seems to be nonproductive--you may need to summarize and introduce or re-state a stimulating question.

8. If during a discussion you sense that a significant disagreement exists (and it's not usually so subtle that you have to sense it--more likely it's right out there), ascertain whether it can be reduced by further discussion or whether it must be accepted for the time being. "Can we dig a little deeper to see why we disagree" or "The point on which we differ seems to be the amount of rent we will have to pay over the next two years, and I don't see how we can get the facts we need on that tonight. Can we agree to disagree and move on to the next question?"

9. If a member of the group tries to involve you in controversy, you must try to maintain your position as an interested non-partisan. Remember, if you were partisan, you should have given up the chair ahead of time. You say, "Right now I'd like to get the ideas of all the group on this--perhaps, Florence, you and I can discuss this on the phone tomorrow. What do the rest of you think on this point?"

10. When everyone has had a chance to talk, you summarize. "Our ideas on this issue seem to be these..." "It appears that we all agree on this..." "Have we reached a consensus on this point...?" Can we vote now on this question?"

Once you've conducted your first board or membership meeting, you may wish to evaluate it to assist you in conducting future meetings. Evaluate it from your point of view as chairman and then from the point of view of the members. You may even want to ask one or two members to evaluate it with you. Consider the following:

-- did you cover the agenda? If not, why not?

-- did everyone who wanted to have a chance to participate in the meeting do so? If not, why not?

-- did few or many people participate?

-- what were your strong points? Weak points?

-- how could you improve your weak points?

-- what was the best part of the meeting? What was the worst part?

-- were people comfortable?

-- was the meeting as a whole satisfactory? Why or why not?

In addition to evaluating meetings you've already held, it's also necessary to evaluate the need for further meetings. In a cooperative every member has a policy-making role, and that is one reason for having meetings--to make policy decisions. If there are no decisions to make, no issues to decide, why have a meeting? Certainly not to hear the treasurer and secretary's reports. Don't call a meeting for the sake of having a meeting. Schools can have parent education meetings with speakers or films, etc. That's great, and these meetings can be totally separate from their business meetings. Or some schools combine business meetings with a speaker. If you do so, fine--but don't make your speaker sit through the business, and don't plan on covering much business. You wouldn't get through our sample agenda, for instance. If you have brief business, either invite your speaker to come at 8:30 p.m. with the business meeting at 8:00 p.m., or have the speaker at 8:00 p.m. and have the business meeting when he's finished. Again, if the "business" consists of the treasurer and secretary's reports, dismiss it. They can be written up in the newsletter or posted on the bulletin board.

Now this is true to a lesser extent of board meetings. The board is responsible for the day to day operation of the school, and it's necessary for the president to know that all of her board members and various committee members are functioning. If (and this is not usually the case) no questions or new ideas or problems arise in a month that require the board's discussion, the president may be able to check in with the board members by phone to see that they're doing what they're supposed to be doing. Generally, however, something comes up that needs to be discussed boardwide. And for the sake of open communication, each board member needs to know what is happening around

the school in general. But a meeting held when there's nothing much to discuss often turns into a gossip session. And while back-fence gossip may be fun, it does not belong in a co-op. It can result only in trouble. So use your own judgment. If two or three months go by when there's "nothing much to discuss" that could be a danger signal. It could mean that:

The school is not being run democratically--the president is making all the decisions, or

The director is making all the decisions, depriving the parents of their right to run the school, or

The school is stagnating--no new ideas are ever introduced.

Group Dynamics

The members of a co-op make up a group. A group is a collection of people that are "collected" for some reason. They need to know why they're there (the purpose), they need to know how they'll achieve their purpose (the structure), and they need a way in which to interact.

Look at your board. You know the purpose (to administer the operations of the school). You've discussed the structure: monthly meetings at which board members report on how the school is functioning, propose solutions to problems, etc. You are all interacting--as members of the co-op, more specifically as members of the board, most specifically within your assigned jobs.

Now, a group needs something else: it needs somebody to watch these interactions and to respond to the group's need for purpose, structure and interaction. In other words, a group requires leadership. You could define many qualities that comprise leadership: the ability to inspire, creativity,

the ability to command respect, executive ability, understanding and so forth. The catch is that you don't always find all of these qualities highly developed in one person, so it is both wise and necessary to share leadership. That's one of the main reasons for having a board rather than one executive officer.

The greatest service you can perform for your school is to encourage each board member to use her capabilities to share in the leadership. You will find in your board various characteristics that can contribute to shared leadership.* They include:

--The inspiration giver: the person who inspires a group to start a project. She's imaginative, energetic, innovative, she cooks up some great ideas. She might be your parent education chairman or your ways and means chairman.

--The executive: she has the gift for carrying out operational details very carefully. This is perhaps the person you choose to run your spring bazaar or to schedule mothers' helping days.

--The ever popular critic: she can point out flaws and shortcomings and ask penetrating questions about them. This is a good person to put in a position that requires careful analysis of operations, perhaps as treasurer.

--The interpreter-harmonizer: she can help each group member understand and appreciate his or her own contributions and those of others. It's very useful if the president has this skill.

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*Katherine Whiteside Taylor, Parents and Children Learn Together, New York Teachers College Press, 1967.

It's not necessary that you fill board positions according to who displays these qualities because, in most instances, when you put together a new board you don't know what leadership qualities the people have. What is necessary is that as the board begins to work together, you allow the members to develop their capabilities and to share in the leadership regardless of their official positions.

As far as chairing specific meetings, you'll find that you'll build interest and involvement by appointing different leaders for different meetings when the purposes are different. The purpose of a business meeting is to take action, which requires a different set of skills (those already described) than the purpose of a parent education discussion which is to increase knowledge. Although you may have the ability to lead both types of meetings yourself, it's smart to encourage others to lead where they can contribute.

Dealing with Conflict

You are safe in assuming that in a parent co-operative--or really in any group that works together--conflict will arise from time to time. Maybe some of you have already been exposed to it. The thing to keep in mind is that conflict is not bad in itself (it's actually healthy), but you don't let it throw a monkey wrench into the operation of the school or let it get to the point that some members resign from the school or the board.

What causes conflict?*

*For a more detailed discussion of the topic, see Chapter 12 "Group Dynamics Among Parents" in Parents and Children Learn Together, from which some of this material is adapted.

--Poor communication....Either because certain things were not communicated, or because what was communicated was misunderstood because it was not clearly communicated, or because certain things were communicated behind someone's back.

--A dominating chairman....Too strong leadership which doesn't give the group members chances to use their capabilities. What often happens (usually without the realization of the president) is that the group is called together to make a decision to give a semblance of democracy to the process, but what they're really being asked to do is rubber stamp the president's preconceived ideas. Sometimes they're asked to rubber stamp the director's preconceived ideas. You can generally avoid this by making sure everyone understands in advance how decisions are to be made and by bending over backwards to be receptive to the ideas of others.

--Insensitivity to the needs of others. Two points here:

You've probably heard the maxim "A child is never so much in need of love as when he is unlovable." Well, apply that to adults: "A parent is never so much in need of help as when she is most unhelpful." You may find a parent who is really a troublemaker, who is very difficult to deal with. If you feel that you "have to put up with" this parent, you'll never resolve the problem. If you have a genuine wish to work with her and understand her and if you look for ways that you can approach her with something constructive to do, you may find her attitude will change. By the way, this is not the parent who doesn't participate when she's supposed to (that's not conflict), this is the one who is a constant critic, the thorn in your side, the enternal faultfinder.

The other point, which we all lose sight of, is that people need recognition. They need to feel appreciated. This is particularly true in

co-ops where parents often get bogged down in the mickey mouse jobs that are needed for the co-op to operate but which have absolutely no glamour. Don't be surprised to hear griping about some issue from the mops and brooms chairman who may be griping because it's a way of being recognized. Now this doesn't mean that you blow her job out of proportion in order to keep her from griping--you're not going to give her a certificate of merit for buying and maintaining the mops and brooms or thank her at the next membership meeting for her splendid selection at the hardware store. That would be phony. But you can seek her opinions and ideas on questions other than housekeeping and give her the chance to assume other tasks which might be more significant.

This is true, too, of the member who has worked very hard on some specific project or who has had a job that really took much time and effort. If her efforts go unrecognized, she is likely either to stir up some conflict or to bad mouth the school in the community. People really need to be appreciated, yet you don't recognize people simply to avoid conflict.

When conflict develops what do you do? The first thing, and often the hardest, is to separate the issue from the personalities involved. What you're really asking is "what's at stake here?" And often you find that what's at stake is not really the issue but somebody's feelings. "If you disagree with me then you're attacking me. You're telling me I'm stupid or misguided or wrong." Maybe that's not actually the case, but if a person sees it that way, she must be helped to not identify so closely with the issue. And the way to help her is, again, to offer her respect and recognition so that she's not struggling for it within the conflict. The conflict should be over the issues, not her identity.

When you get it to the issue level, the group should study the issue

very carefully. Make sure that all sides are heard and understood. A helpful way to do this is for you to say, "Mary, I hear you saying.....is that right?" If you feel confident enough, say to Sue who is opposed to Mary's view: "Sue, tell Mary what you heard her say." Then say to Mary, "Is that right?" If not, Mary should correct Sue. "No, what I meant is...." Then give Mary the opportunity to recap what she heard Sue saying. They don't have to agree at that point, but at least each understands what the other is saying. One of the greatest frustrations in a conflict situation is the feeling that the other person has not really heard what you're saying--that he's heard only what he wants to hear or that while you're talking, he's so busy formulating his rebuttal that he can't hear what you're saying.

Once the issue is clear and both sides are understood, there is a simple secret for resolving the conflict. This is assuming that both sides have some merit, which is usually the case. The "secret" is that this is not a football game which must be won or lost, nor is it even a debate in which there's really no attempt to reach an agreement or share ideas but the objective is merely to win the debate. What you have in a co-op is a group that must live together with whatever decisions are made, and so you will try to make a decision that takes the best of both sides. In other words, <u>compromise</u>. If the opposing sides cannot compromise, it's likely that a decision should be postponed--if not, you won't have resolved the conflict, you'll simply have a winner and a loser.

If the issue is very acute (in other words a decision must be reached without too much delay) and compromise does not seem likely, it would help to call in an outside consultant. You do not necessarily need a consultant with

expertise in the area being discussed (for instance, if you're arguing the merits of mixing age groups vs. keeping three- and four-year-olds separate you don't absolutely have to call in a child development specialist). What you do need is a consultant who can help with the group process, who can help your group see where compromise could occur or what more you need to do before you try to decide. It's much easier for an impartial outsider to be objective about what he sees happening in a group than the members of the group themselves.

Constructive Criticism

Constructive criticism (if there is such a thing) is related to conflict since often it leads to conflict.

As discussed earlier, the role of the president or her representative includes regular meetings with the teacher and/or director, and things will come up which could be termed "constructive criticism," or "suggestions." Or you might even find yourself constructively criticizing another board member. This can get touchy....you're a volunteer criticizing another volunteer, and it's hard to fire any volunteer. Depending on the situation, sometimes it's wise rather than trying to shape up a board member to ask her if she would like a co-chairman to help her. If so, you gradually assign more and more responsibility to the co-chairman. Or if that's not feasible, ask the person if she really feels she can meet the responsibilities of the job (maybe she's one of those unfortunate souls who can't say "no," but she'd rather not have taken the job as treasurer). If she says "no" now, fine, assign someone else. If she says "yes, I'd like to continue in the job" tell her that you have some concerns about her missing the last six board meetings

and having failed to pay the teachers on time, so how can you help her?

Again, that situation is less likely to occur than one in which you need to meet with the teacher so let's deal with that one. First, understand that criticism, even that which is meant to be constructive, is not easy to do, and it's rarely taken well. People don't like to be criticized. Next, be prepared for the person you're criticizing to become defensive. And there are all kinds of defenses against criticism. One of the most insidious occurs in the following example:

The president greets the teacher with a really serious problem: "I don't like to have to say this to you, but the board is quite upset about your chronic tardiness. We don't want to offend you, but your being late really worries us. We're afraid that something will happen to one of the children while you're not there." And so on...

The teacher responds with: "I understand how hard it is for you to say all of this to me, and I'm really sorry that I've upset the board. I know how hard they work and how much time they each put into the school. I can see how the board could worry, and I do apologize for causing you so much concern." And so on....

The president: "I'm so glad you're not angry. I was really dreading this conversation. I appreciate your cooperation and I just want to tell you how much the board respects your work with the children."

Although this is a fairly broad example, it illustrates what happens when criticisms fall on sympathetic ears. The critic generally backs down, and the criticisms don't get dealt with. While the teacher has shown great concern for the board's feelings and the president's discomfort, she has not responded to the point in question--her tardiness. And the president has not

resolved this issue.

The other thing that often happens is that the other person will begin to cry. People get very uncomfortable when they make another person cry. We've all used that fact to our advantage, you can be sure. But if you have significant things to discuss, you can't be put off by tears or rage (you may get that, too). Offer the person a tissue or a minute to calm down and proceed.

How do you do it?

Think about what you're going to say before you start. Starting with, "Can I talk with you about something important?" might bring an answer "no" or "not now" or "never." Then where will you be? It's better to start with something the teacher can respond to substantively. A question: "Why don't you allow the children to pour their own juice?" will get an answer even if the answer needs to be followed by another question. Or, if you say, "I think you should be allowing the children to pour their own juice" you'll probably get "Well, I think," and that permits the teacher to feel that she can respond.

Don't make the conversation all negative. Try to have one positive comment for every negative one.

Discuss one criticism at a time, don't pile it on. And only criticize that which is significant. The way the teacher wears her hair is too trivial to be considered.

Believe in the criticism yourself. Don't play middle man for someone else because the teacher will ask you how you feel about it, and you'll have to say that you don't object to her arriving at 9:02 when the children arrive at 9:05 but twenty other mothers do. As long as the teacher knows you don't

care, she's got an important and powerful ally. Also, if you don't believe in the criticism yourself, you won't give it the proper weight. If you don't agree, ask the person who objects to talk about it with the teacher.

Don't spring a criticism when you arrive at school one morning or by calling the teacher at 11:30 p.m. Sunday. The monthly teacher-president meetings mentioned will eliminate the teacher fearing that you'll approach her out of the blue with a major problem. On the other hand, if you don't like the way the teacher is handling the school Christmas celebration, it won't do much good to discuss it after the first of the year if that's when your next regularly scheduled meeting is.

Allow for mutuality. After you criticize the teacher she has the right to air her complaints about the school, the board or any individual (including you). And let her talk as soon as possible to relieve her feelings of defensiveness. The longer you talk, the less chance she'll really be listening and the more defensive she'll become.

Remember that criticisms should not be made before a group or by a group. They should be kept on a one-to-one basis with the possible exception of times that you have consulted the director regarding a teacher's performance. If the director has spoken to the teacher and you are to speak with the teacher also, the teacher may wish to have the director present. It's her choice.

If the discussion is anything other than a regular session at which constructive suggestions for improvement are being exchanged--for instance, if it's a meeting at which a contract which has been revised from previous years is presented,or a formal evaluation is being made, or a major change in policy that affects the teacher is introduced, it's useful if both

parties are willing to have an observer present to make sure that all parties agree on what they agree on.

PARENT EDUCATION

In a cooperative, parent education encompasses everything that goes on which (1) enables the parent to be a trained classroom assistant, (2) improves a parent's ability to understand her child's development, cope with daily childhood problems and appreciate the special joys of parenthood, (3) informs a parent about some of the current philosophies, theories, and methods of early childhood education and (4) enhances the parent's growth as a person and a member of contemporary society.*

The founders of the co-op movement intended parent education, in its widest sense, to be an integral part of a co-op since a co-op by definition is a place where parents and children go to school together. The parents are there on a regular basis with the opportunity to observe a trained professional. What's even more compelling is the fact that a co-op is a group of adults from different backgrounds, with different experiences, all of whom have a common denominator--children the same age at similar levels of development. And it doesn't matter if some parents are young and inexperienced in handling children, if some have several children, or if some have had college training in early childhood education. Everyone has something to learn,and everyone has something to teach.

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*Barbara Meyers, "Suggestions for Parent Education Chairmen," Maryland Council of Parent Participation Nursery Schools, Inc., 1971.

This is one time, maybe the only time in your child's life, when you will be able to work closely with his teacher, to learn first-hand about child behavior and development and to share problems and seek solutions with other parents who really understand what you say and feel because they're going through it, too. So if you, personally, value parent education as a help to you, it will aid in planning it for the school as a whole.

As stated above, parent education should enable the parent to be a trained classroom assistant. If you do nothing else, you should make concrete plans for achieving that goal. No parent can be excused from learning how to intelligently aid a particular teacher in providing a particular kind of classroom experience. Looking at some other aspects of parent education demonstrates the on-the-job training for parenthood which parent education is all about.

A lot of parent learning occurs from observation and instruction during classroom participation or from informal conversations between teacher and parent or between parents. In many instances these experiences are more effective than meetings at which a speaker discusses a particular topic. There are other methods also, less formal than speakers, that are instructive. They include:

parent-teacher conferences
interesting items in the school newsletter
a lending library of current books and magazine articles
slides or films, either made by parents or teachers or commercially distributed
bulletin board displays
the school handbook (every school should have one)
visit to other schools
informal coffees
council meetings and workshops

If you plan well, any or all of these methods may be put to good use.

Parent Meetings

If you wish to plan for specific parent education meetings (either small meetings of individual classes or large meetings--the whole school or perhaps several schools in one area that might like to get together), try to find out what topics are of interest to your group. You can do this by asking--either orally or via a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board, or you can suggest some topics and have the parents indicate their preference. Often ideas for topics will be generated from events that occur in the school or among families. For instance, if you have a bumper crop of pregnant mothers, good topics would be: sibling rivalry ("How Can I Keep Him From Disposing of the Baby?") or sex education ("How, When, Why and Who Should Teach It?") and so on. Other topics that might be of interest are:

the influence of television
the changing roles of fathers
finding values for today's children
nutrition for children
language development
what does the women's movement mean to us?
dealing with children's fears
children's art (what, why and how)
children and pets
encouraging creativity
developing physical skills in children
what's being done about pollution
who is Piaget
children's books
and the old favorite--discipline

You can cover these or other topics using individual speakers, films or panels.

If you need a speaker, start at least three to four weeks in advance. Try to find out if he's spoken to similar groups and, if so, check his references. Don't rely on his scholastic credentials, but investigate his ability to relate to an audience. Be sure he knows how long he's supposed to speak and if there is

to be a question period afterward. Tell him the size and background of the group. Find out whether he charges a fee which he might waive for your group. When you hear a good speaker, add his name to a list of speakers you should be compiling for future reference. Whom might you get as speakers? Universities often have speakers' bureaus. Your local school system could provide the names of psychologists, social workers, language specialists, etc. Social service agencies provide speakers. The local mental health association, the local library, the agricultural extension service, plus many professionals (pediatricians, dentists, ministers, veterinarians, politicians, etc.) can help. Don't overlook the talent in your own school either.

Films (usually available from the public library) work well in conjunction with discussion groups. The groups should ideally contain no more than 12-15 people so that everyone can talk. You need a good leader for each group--a little pre-meeting training will enable you to use your own members as discussion leaders.

Panel discussions and debates are usually stimulating provided you have well-informed, out-going people who can think on their feet without prepared speeches. You need a good moderator who can keep things balanced and moving and who can field questions from the audience and direct them to the appropriate panelist.

Another good idea for a group is some sort of participation activity. Maybe a paint and splash party where the parents try the art activities that are available to the children. Or instead of having a music teacher lecture, have her conduct a class with the parents. Some parents may be self-conscious at first--but give them time to unwind.

Some of your parents might be interested in setting up a book club. The

members must be willing to read the books that will be discussed at the meetings and to assume the leadership on a rotating basis. The group should choose the book for the coming meeting well ahead of time, and the leader should come prepared with some background information on the author, reviews of the book, and some of her own reactions or stimulating questions to get the discussion started. There are any number of good books on child management, discipline, education, personality development or social problems which would make for great discussion. Ask your local librarian.

Another possibility for a small group meeting is, if she's willing, to have your teacher lead a meeting. Several schools have had great success with a class meeting in October or November at which each parent briefly discussed her own child before the group--telling about her knowledge of his needs and his interests, describing a little of the family situation (the child's position in the family, if he had lived through some major experiences or adjustments recently) and so on. These meetings were traditionally held at the teachers' homes.

The teacher should also lead what are actually "staff meetings" on how she would like some typical age-level problems handled; she might offer a run-through of her plans for the next month or so and her ideas on how the parents can help her; she might share some classroom anecdotes and lead a discussion of their relevance for child learning and development; she might simply discuss the material and equipment in the classroom and playground: how it can be used and how it contributes to learning.

All of these activities work only if the teacher is willing and if the parents have a real chance to plan and participate in the meetings. It does not work if the teacher says, "Well--this is what the parents need to know for

the next 9 months; I'll find some speakers and get some books and lead the meetings myself."

Now you have some terrific meetings planned: some formal presentations, some informal meetings, some discussions led by the teacher, some outside speakers. It's really going to be great! Now--how do you get the parents to come?

There is no sure-fire way to guarantee attendance at meetings. Some schools make them compulsory and fine members for unexcused absences. This is hard to handle--you really don't want to force people to come, and some people would rather pay a $2 or $3 fine than pay a babysitter in order to get out to a meeting. They miss the point that the money spent on the sitter is money better spent than paying a fine, but nonetheless they miss the meeting. If your program is stimulating, if it relates to the interests of the parents and involves them, attendance is more likely to be greater. Also, if you start and end on time people will be more willing to commit two hours of their time.

To encourage attendance, publicize the meeting via the newsletter and bulletin board. Add provocative quotes on the topic to the meeting announcement or send out a list of agree-disagree questions if the topic lends itself to that. List titles of books and pamphlets dealing with the topic so that parents who want to can do some preliminary reading.

Try to have an interest-getter at each meeting such as photos of the children in action, or an automatic slide projector showing class activities, or pictures with humorous captions, or pictures posted on the wall for which the members can write captions as they come in.

As for the mechanics of getting people to come, you may wish to arrange

carpools to meetings. Have each board member call a portion of the membership to invite them to the meeting. Getting fathers to attend meetings is easier if you have fathers on the board or various committees since you'll have a nucleus to begin with. You might ask them to personally call some other fathers to invite them. If you can involve fathers in the planning and execution of the meeting, so much the better. The cardinal rule to remember is never, never plan a meeting on a night or Saturday when some important sports event is scheduled. Admittedly, this is difficult, but it's worth the effort to plan around it.

Another way to involve fathers in parent education is to schedule a father's visiting day, once or twice a year. Some communities set aside a special day or week when the public schools are open for visitation. Your co-op may wish to plan its visiting days to coincide with those. In that case the mothers will participate as teacher assistants as usual, but as the fathers come to observe they may become actively involved in the program.

Other schools schedule an open house on a Saturday when fathers and siblings can see the school. This is better than nothing, but the fathers don't see the actual program in action. If possible (and it requires some juggling), try to hold an actual class on Saturday. This can be done by cancelling a normal school session during the week and holding it on Saturday instead. In that way, the teacher is not working an extra day, and the children are not attending an extra day. The picture a father gets of the program (his amazement that a single teacher can hold the attention of fifteen three-year-olds for more than twenty seconds, or his delight in seeing his wife speak calmly to Johnny who has just hit Billy over the head with a block) is much more than when everyone is milling around at an open

house, spilling punch and losing puzzle pieces.

Don't forget that fathers can and should participate whenever possible since it's important for a child to be able to share his father as well as his mother. Fathers who work shifts which permit them time off during the day or fathers whose professional practices allow them flexibility can participate regularly as well as in substitution for their wives. Many schools have found that participation offers an enlightening experience for the fathers and a welcome change of role models for the children.

Orientation

Orientation consists of the basic how to, when to and where the garbage cans are.

As stated earlier, people function best when they know exactly what is expected of them. The more a parent understands of her own role as a parent and teacher assistant and the dimensions of this role within the school, the greater her contribution to the school program.

Orientation does not begin in September--it does not begin in August--it does not even begin in May. It begins with the very first telephone call from a prospective member. At this time questions are answered, and expectations are set on both sides. The purpose, structure and benefits of the school are explained while the parent's role is explicitly defined. If you do a good enough job right here, you'll weed out those who really are not interested in committing the time and energy required. And it's better to find out now than later.

Assuming the person is still interested, the next contact occurs when she visits the school and/or is interviewed by the membership chairman. At

this time, the membership chairman should give the prospective member written materials to look at and become familar with. They could include an outline of the school's program, the handbook, the by-laws and, if available, some easy to read literature on child development. Some schools have the person sign a membership agreement at that time which stipulates all of the conditions of membership.

Usually membership interviews are held in the spring. Between that time and the time the family becomes actively involved in the school in the fall, communication between home and school should be continuous. Keep in touch with that family during the summer via newsletters, visits to the home by the teacher, social events, etc., and even an early orientation meeting so that by the time the mother is asked to assume her responsibility she is knowledgeable, interested and enthusiastic.

Many schools have one large group orientation meeting before school opens--usually in early September. It's often very chaotic. There's a lot of information to be shared; people don't get to know one another. There are lots of papers passed out which get lost, and it's generally a confusing start.

What works better is to hold some small group meetings in August, particularly for families new to the school. This is when you show them where things are, what the set up of equipment is, and explain how they are to help. Allow ample time for questions. The more relaxed and informal the sessions, the quicker new members will become oriented. This is also the time to inform the new members of what they'll need to do before school starts such as getting TB exams, arranging for insurance coverage if they're going to be carpooling, getting the child's medical forms in, and so forth.

A second orientation meeting should be planned for the entire membership right before school opens. This is a little more formal, although you should do everything you can to make people feel comfortable. Provide name tags for everybody--perhaps color coded by class (morning 3's wear blue tags--the afternoon 4's wear red). Include the child's name on the tag.

All present should introduce themselves, and the teachers and board members should be introduced by position as well as name. There is usually so much to be said at this meeting that only those who really must speak should. So while the participation chairman must explain the schedules, the ways and means chairman does not have to discuss the selling of Christmas cards. Allow some time on the program for the director to speak briefly on the educational philosophy and for each teacher to talk a little about her goals for the year.

What needs to be covered? It will vary from school to school, but generally the president, the orientation chairman, and whatever chairmen are responsible for certain areas will cover:

> --The parents' role in the classroom: what to do on arrival, where to find out what the schedule for the day is, rules on smoking and talking with other adults, how to handle some common classroom problems, etc. Some of this will repeat what was discussed in August.
>
> --Organizational details: how and when to pay tuition, carpool regulations and assignments, health and safety regulations, information on insurance policies for the children, establishing complaint channels, committee assignments.
>
> --The children's first days at school:what they need to bring (extra clothing, boots, etc.) how to prepare them for separation, how to cope with extremes of behavior, etc.

Again, allow time for questions. This is all new to many members, and for some, it's quite intimidating. Stress what they need to know, not what's

interesting about the mosaic on the wall.

When school has been underway long enough for every member to have participated at least once, plan another orientation meeting. Once people have gotten their feet wet, they'll be likely to have questions which need to be discussed in detail. Also, the teachers will have had a chance to determine the areas in which the parents need more help.

When possible, try to schedule the first weeks of participation so that an experienced mother is present on the same day as a new mother. It really helps!

RUNNING A BUSINESS

As a board member of a co-op, you are not only responsible for being a teacher assistant and having a specific job in the school, you are also part of a business establishment. Congratulations! Any operation that takes money from people in return for a service is a business, and so it's necessary to function in a business-like manner.

Generally, that means having stated policies and procedures that can be changed if necessary but are there to guide your operations. In other words, not flying by the seat of your pants.

When you take in money from the public, you need a procedure for handling the money and you need policies that guide you in how it's spent, if it's ever refunded and so forth; those will be discussed further on.

When you employ a teacher, you need a hiring procedure; you need policies that define the terms of her employment (a contract and a job description). You also need to keep personnel records for every teacher the school has employed.

Teacher Hiring

The hiring of a new teacher is one of the board's most important jobs, but the board as a whole does not interview. Usually a special committee is named of about three or four people including the director, if a teacher is being hired. If the director is being hired, the parents do the job alone. Appoint one person to screen applicants--to take phone calls and weed out the obviously unqualified. This prevents the interview committee from wasting a lot of time on applicants with no potential. You should have an application and a job description which can be mailed out when an applicant first calls

and a contract that can be offered as soon as you've reached a decision.

The application should include basic information such as that included on the sample in Appendix C, page 70. You may also want to add a thought-provoking question that requires the applicant to share some of her thinking about pre-school education and allows you to see how well she expresses herself. For example:

> Please share your thoughts on the following activity:
>
> For a Valentine's Day art activity, the teacher presents each child with a red heart-shaped piece of construction paper and a white paper doily, some glitter and some glue. She instructs each child to glue the heart on the doily, and decorate it with glitter. As each child finishes, the teacher writes "Happy Valentine's Day to Mommy and Daddy" and signs the child's name.

The job description describes all aspects of her daily teaching responsibilities: "The teacher is responsible for setting up equipment and materials, for providing a variety of learning experiences for the children, for guiding the mother helpers, etc."

You would also include her more global duties: "The teacher will develop and follow a curriculum that provides for social, physical, intellectual and emotional growth. She will evaluate each child's progress and report to the parents, not only in scheduled conferences but also as necessary during the year."

"The teacher will act as a resource to the parents on questions of supplies, on matters of program and on child growth and development. The teacher shall represent the school professionally in the community, and shall avail herself of in-service education, workshops, etc. to promote her own professional growth."

The job description should also include whom the teacher supervises and/or

by whom she is supervised.

In preparing a job description, identify what it is that the teacher does and what more the job should be. For instance, the mere fact that your current teacher does not presently attend workshops doesn't mean that you write it out of the job description. Instead you write it into her contract and encourage her to abide by it if you're planning to rehire her, or you write it into the new teacher's contract. The problem is that you cannot anticipate every contingency--either in the contract or in the job description--so to some extent, you must depend on mutual good faith. If you find your current teacher is not doing something because it's not specifically mentioned in the contract or the job description even though, to the board, it appears that she ought to do it as part of her professional responsibility, then don't retain her. For instance, if she's not having snack with the children--she uses that time to go on a cigarette break--and she claims it doesn't say in her contract or job description that she must have snack with them, then she's not fulfilling an accepted professional responsibility.

If, on the other hand, she refuses to make home visits or to attend evening meetings because her contract does not stipulate that her salary covers those obligations, she is justified in claiming that she does not have to do so--even if it was said to her that she did. It's not nice for her to do that, but that's a significant added responsibility that you can't hold her to if it's not in the contract. You may not wish to re-hire her, either. You could re-hire a teacher who said, "I didn't realize you wanted me to do this since it's not in my contract and, of course, I'll do it now, but please stipulate it next year." You can avoid this kind of confusion by making a

specific contract.

The contract essentially covers the conditions of employment: what the employee is expected to do in return for what the employer is expected to do. This is different from the job description which expands specifically on the employee's duties and defines them, but there may be some overlap. A sample contract is presented as Appendix D, page 72.

Once you've received the completed applications, schedule interviews. Thirty minutes is about right, and if you're having a succession of applicants on one day, allow time in between interviews for the committee to react to whom they've seen and to prevent one applicant from coming in while another is still there.

The object of the interview is to find out as much as possible about the applicant. You can put yourselves (the committee) and applicant at ease by planning the interview in advance so that you don't fumble around. Try to ask open-ended questions, not those which require "yes" and "no" answers. Don't take notes or show disapproval nor be so awed by something the applicant says that you don't hear the rest. It's usually best if only one person asks the questions, although a committee member who is unclear about a response may ask for clarification.

The committee should be careful of talking too much--you really want to hear what the applicant has to say. Since an interview is somewhat of a test, all the applicants should be judged on the same questions. Begin by briefly describing the job and the school without going into much detail on philosophy--you want to hear the teacher's philosophy.

You might go on by having the person describe her latest job, then tell why or how she went into pre-school education. Ask what she sees as the

advantages of working with parents in the classroom and especially what she sees as the disadvantages. Ask her to describe a typical day's program for the age group she will be teaching. Ask her what she thinks should be accomplished over the year by a three or four-year-old and how she would handle parents who have a different opinion on this. What are her ideas on what a good parent education program could accomplish? How would she handle a child who disrupts quiet activities or a child who stands outside the group continuously sucking his thumb?

It's not necessary to ask all of these--but try to get an idea of her feelings toward parents as well as her ideas on classroom methods and her educational philosophy.

Allow her to ask you questions, and then finish by asking any specific questions that have arisen from her application blank (why has she had so many jobs, questions about her schooling, etc.)

When the committee has decided on a candidate, have the courtesy to notify the other applicants that the job has been filled. You can call or write--be sure to thank them for their interest. You may wish to ask your second and third choice of applicants if they would be willing to substitute in your school.

Teacher Evaluation

The January or February board meeting is usually the best time for the board to make the decision to renew a teacher's contract. Why this early? It gives the teacher a chance to find a new job if she's not being rehired, and it gives the board some time to begin to find another teacher (this should be started as soon as possible so the new and returning members know that there will be a teacher). If the teacher is being rehired with a salary increment offered in the new contract, it gives the treasurer the needed information

in preparing the budget.

Evaluation does not start in January or February, however, it occurs all year long. The board usually knows how the membership feels about the teaching staff especially when the feelings are either very positive or very negative. Also, the president has been meeting with the teacher all along, so that a problem isn't just "discovered" in January or February.

Here are some questions to guide you in evaluating a teacher:

In the area of teaching performance, does she know what should be included in a good preschool program, and can she provide it? Does she plan a variety of interesting activities that promote physical, social, emotional and intellectual development? Is her program tailored to the age, interest and ability levels of the children? How does she handle discipline? How does she relate to the children in a group and individually?

In the area of parent-teacher relationships, how does she work with parents? Is she friendly, outgoing and comfortable in supervising parents? Does she understand her role as a parent educator and does she implement it? What is her relationship with the board? Is she domineering, passive, trusting--or what? How does she accept all that constructive criticism you're now so skilled at giving?

As an employee, is she dependable? Does she get to work on time, inform you as soon as possible when she has to be absent? Does she carry out the terms of her contract? Does she show good judgment in everyday matters?

The answers to some of these questions could be negative, but if you have no major complaints, you may feel you want to retain her. The board should look very carefully at which questions are answered negatively. If they are issues that have been discussed all along--that the teacher has

been made aware of and is unable to show progress toward improvement, if they are key components of the school (the classroom program, her teaching methods, her relationship with the parents), the board should consider terminating her employment. If the decision is made to do so, the president should meet with her to express the board's concern that she has been unable to show growth in whatever area it is and the feeling that they would prefer to hire another teacher. Assuming it is true, the teacher should be told that the board respects the effort she has made and is appreciative of the good work she has done in whatever area she has done good work. This is much better than simply announcing to the teacher that her contract will not be renewed, and if the president has been meeting regularly with the teacher around areas that need improvement, it is not likely to be a surprise to the teacher.

Sometimes a board really wants to replace a teacher but they lack the courage to do so outright, so they impose conditions which are designed to make the teacher resign. They might give the other teacher or teachers a hefty raise and give the teacher in question no raise. That's hypocritical. If you want to fire a teacher, do it, but do so in a manner which is honest and amicable and does not assign blame.

What happens when you inform a teacher in February that she will not be re-hired for the next year? The worst that could happen is that she resigns on the spot. Most don't, for that's highly unprofessional and you wouldn't give them a very good reference. If a teacher does resign, start immediately to find a replacement. A good source, besides placing an ad, is the local Job Bank run by Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C) or the place-offices of the area universities.

If she is not considering immediate resignation, tell the teacher that you would like to announce to the membership that she will not be renewing her contract for the next year, because you want to be protective of her relationship with the group. However, don't do that if the teacher does not want you to because she may feel that she's being railroaded by the board. She could say to the membership, "Oh, no--I'd like to continue here but the board does not want me." And if she arouses sympathy in even a few of the members, you've got problems! What happens is that her performance is no longer an issue but rather how the board has treated her. You can avoid that pitfall by asking her how she wants to handle it. If she wants it known that the board is not rehiring her, you must be open about it with the membership.

To summarize, the board's decision on rehiring should be made on the basis of teaching performance, parent-teacher relationships, and employee standards. Ongoing feedback from parents in those areas will help you. Feedback other than in these areas (someone doesn't like the way she dresses or the way she lives) should be disregarded provided that she is appropriately dressed when she appears at school and that her personal life doesn't come to school with her.

When you offer a new contract for the coming year, it's desirable to include an increment in salary which should approximate the current cost of living increase. If your school can afford it, some other gocd fringe benefits to offer include payment of the teacher's membership in a professional organization, or a tuition stipend for a professional or college course, or a year-end or Christmas bonus.

Personnel Records

What do you do when a teacher who was employed six years before your board took office requests a reference? What do you do when the state industrial commission is reviewing a workmen's compensation claim filed two years ago by a substitute who was employed for less than two weeks by your school? What do you do when the board wishes to compute the percent of salary increases over the last five years? You look in the personnel records!

There should be a separate personnel folder for every employee (including substitutes) that has ever been on the school's payroll. These records are confidential and should be safeguarded along with other vital papers that are in the president's file.

Each personnel folder should include the following:

1. the completed employment application.
2. written references.
3. reports of physical examinations and any other health records.
4. the signed contract.
5. evaluation reports--a one page, year-end narrative report of strengths and weaknesses or a prepared form. These reports should be signed by both the president and the teacher with the president's copy filed in the personnel folder.
6. narrative reports of regular or special conferences with the teacher.
7. any correspondence relating to the teacher.
8. any records of transfers, promotions, bonuses or similar salary adjustments, or other employment actions affecting the teacher. These records would include the minutes of any board meetings at which such actions were discussed and voted upon.
9. a record of employment and termination dates.
10. requests for references received from other employers.
11. any other information or statements that the teacher would like to have included in her folder.

Preparing Budgets

Budgeting is essentially a simple process which is done one of two ways. You figure out what it costs to run the operation (your expenses) and then acquire the income to cover the expenses--or you look at the available income and determine what expenses you can incur. The latter is obviously the way it's done in household budgets. You don't decide you need a new house so therefore you'll rob a bank to cover the expenses. You look at your income and decide what kind of a new house you can afford, and you find yourself rapidly coming to grips with reality.

But in school, the budget is your educational philosophy expressed in dollars and "sense". When you're budgeting for a school in which you offer a service in return for a fee, your plan should be to decide what it costs to provide a level of service consistent with your philosophy and then assess your fees.

The simplest way to do this is to divide the amount of money needed to operate per month or year by the number of children to be served to get what the income per child should be. So if it costs $10,000 per year to operate and you enroll 50 children, the tuition per child should be fixed at $200 per year. It is best not to include projected income from fund raising in computing the fee per child unless you have an extremely reliable and predictable source of fund raising. More on that later.

The obvious question in all of this is: how do you know how much it will cost to operate per year? Some costs are fixed (such as rent and salaries), some costs can be estimated from last year's expenditures (such as equipment and supplies) and some expenses will arise unexpectedly (such as advertising for a new teacher or buying a new vacuum cleaner when the old

one suddenly refuses to work).

In preparing a budget, your total income should equal your total expenses. It should be evident that if expenses are projected which exceed the income which has been projected, your school is in trouble. Your goal should be to have a balanced budget and to have a reserve or savings fund which could cover all operating expenses for at least one month, preferably more, so that a sudden drop-off of income or some sudden major expense can be absorbed immediately without undue damage. Any excess funds beyond those required for reserve can be used to maintain tuition at low rates, to support scholarships or to purchase major items of equipment in the luxury category.

In drawing up a budget, identify all sources of income:

tuition
application fees
special fees (equipment fees, fees for snack, etc.)
fund raising projects
fines
interest from savings

Then look at expenses. The biggest chunk is usually for staff:

salaries
taxes (social security, unemployment compensation, workmen's compensation)
professional dues, tuition subsidies, or workshop registrations
substitute pay

The next biggest expense is usually housing:

rent
utilities, including telephone
custodial or special maintenance help
renovation and/or repairs

Then there are the expenses of:

permanent equipment:

office equipment (typewriter, duplicator, etc.)
housekeeping equipment (mops, vacuum cleaner, etc.)
program equipment (tables, blocks, games, wagons, etc.)
repairs and maintenance of this equipment

consumable supplies:

housekeeping supplies (cleansers, paper towels, etc.)
snacks
art supplies (paper, paints, etc.)
office supplies (paper, duplicating materials, postage)

insurance:

liability insurance for the school
fire and theft insurance
accident insurance on the teachers and children
bond for the treasurer

dues:

membership in the local council of cooperatives
membership in Parent Cooperative Preschools International

parent education:

fees for speakers
rental of films
purchase of books

hospitality:

coffee and its accompaniments
name tags

reserve fund

professional services (audits, legal fees, consultants, etc.)

miscellaneous

In considering expenses (particularly in the areas of salaries, housing and equipment), try to project not only what the costs will be for the coming year but also how you might spread expected increases over the next few years. For instance, if you know that the piano will have to be reconditioned

within the next two years, you can attribute one-half to one-third of that cost to the proposed equipment budget for the coming year. Since the funds will not be expended until the work is actually done, the amount for the piano set aside in this year's budget can be held in the savings account to earn interest. It is, however, committed to the equipment fund and should not be used for other purposes.

Here is a sample budget which would be presented to the membership for final approval based on the board's recommendation. Note that "carryover from last year" (excess income over expenses) is designated as income this year. Carryover arises when actual expenses are less than budgeted or when actual income is greater than anticipated. Since this mythical school regularly commits part of its operating expense to its reserve fund so that carryover does not automatically have to go into savings, its carryover is used to maintain tuition at the same level as previous years even though the teachers' salaries are greater. As indicated earlier, the carryover could also be used to provide scholarships, to make some major purchase, etc.

Proposed Budget
ABCooperative Preschool

Income		
Tuition (45 children x $250)		$ 11,250
Registration Fee (45 children x $10)		450
Carryover from last year		480
Interest on savings		60
Donations		25
Fund raising project		300
Total		$ 12,565
Expenses		
Salaries		$ 7,650
Payroll taxes		725
Substitutes		250
Professional dues, workshops		75
Rent		1,750
Telephone		150
Repairs		120
Equipment purchase		150
Housekeeping supplies		120
Snacks		250
Classroom supplies		300
Office supplies and postage		60
Parent education		75
Hospitality		50
Liability insurance		100
Accident insurance		90
Treasurer's bond		25
Audit		40
Council and PCPI dues		90
Miscellaneous		95
Reserve fund		400
		$ 12,565

In presenting this budget to the membership, the treasurer should prepare a complete financial statement which would show the budget which had been proposed for the current year as well as the actual budget to date. Thus, members can see how funds are now being spent in comparison with last year's projections and assess how realistic the following year's budget is, particularly in regard to tuition.

The financial statement might look like this sample.

	Proposed budget 19__ (current year)	Actual budget as of March 1, 19__ (current year)	Proposed budget 19__ (next year)
Income			
Tuition	$ 11,250	$ 6,750	$ 11,250
Registration fees	450	480	450
Interest	36	30	60
Donations	0	50	25
Fund raising	250	500	300
Expenses			
(would follow the same format)			
Savings account balance as of March 1, 19__		$ 1,003	
Checking account balance as of March 1, 19__		$ 5,029	

What if it becomes necessary to cut expenses? Where can you save some money?

Not on teachers' salaries. Pay the most you can afford. When you hire a new teacher, you generally start her at a lower salary than the teacher she replaced (especially if that teacher had been there awhile) but never, never fire a teacher whom you like in an effort to economize on salary. If things are really tight, tell the teacher that you will be unable to offer her an increment for the coming year, or even that you are unable to continue to offer her current salary (though things would have to be very drastic to do that).

You can't really save lots of money on equipment and supplies without affecting the over-all program, but you can't allow waste either. Where can

you save? In office supplies, why buy a typewriter if a parent would type for you at home? Save on postage by sending things home via the children or carpool drivers. Try to use the mimeograph or ditto machine at the church where you meet instead of buying your own, or approach the local public school.

For housekeeping supplies, ask parents to send in motel and airline size bars of soap--anyone who travels collects them. They're easier for children to handle anyway. Buy paper towels and cleansers from custodial suppliers, not from the supermarket.

With classroom supplies, look at how paper is used. Parents who work with computers may be able to supply old print-out sheets--the blank backs are fine for crayons, markers, Q-tip painting, etc. Big sheets of newsprint can be cut down. Children can paint directly on newspaper. Shelf paper and brown wrapping paper can be used for art projects. Most teachers have lots of ideas for using discards or for scrounging free materials. There is a lovely booklet called "Beautiful Junk" available from the Office of Child Development, Department of Health, Education & Welfare, Washington, D. C. 20201. Also, try to band together with several schools in your area for discount purchases on supplies.

As far as repair of equipment, enlist parents in the effort. You can even plan a special Saturday for parents to come in and fix up especially if the school provides refreshments and organizes babysitting.

For hospitality, you can either ask different members each to bring coffee, cream, sugar and to bake for each meeting, or you can ask every family to put $.50 or $1.00 in the coffee kitty at the beginning of the year.

Council dues and PCPI dues can be paid by individual families. If your school provides an accident insurance policy for the children, ask each family to pay the cost for its child.

Fund Raising

Fund raising is an extremely unpredictable source of income and should be undertaken only to purchase large items of equipment, or to establish a scholarship fund, or to supplement a dwindling reserve fund, or to meet some other special need. It should not be used to defray monthly expenses.

Note that in the sample budget shown on page 57, the amount projected from fund raising is less than the amount budgeted for reserve. If the school failed to raise $300, the reserve fund could be reduced by that amount. If doing so jeopardized the total reserve fund, then tuition would have to be raised the following year. You may also create a separate budget for fund raising excluding it altogether from the regular operating budget. In that case, funds raised are not included as part of the regular school income, and regular operating expenses are not deducted from whatever funds are raised.

Fund raising activities which attract only the sponsoring school's membership tax the same pocketbooks and are not very attractive. On the other hand, community-wide fund raising activities are a tremendous amount of work. They work well only when everyone is involved in one way or another. This can be a morale booster, since everyone is working together, or a morale breaker if some refuse to participate in any way--especially if their children will benefit from whatever funds are raised. Fund raising efforts take a lot of time and planning well in advance, so they won't work when an emergency situation arises.

What can you do if funds are needed on an emergency basis? You could close the school earlier in the year, or reduce the number of sessions per week. You could approach a bank for a low interest loan, although that is pretty unlikely at this time. You could approach your local co-op council for an emergency loan since many councils have revolving loan funds.

If your school needed some major renovation or repair or a great deal of new equipment, you could try what one school did. The members decided to construct their own building but felt that it was unfair to burden the current membership with the fund raising since the school building would serve hundreds of other members in the years to come. The board therefore devised a scheme of selling bonds to the membership. Each family was required to purchase a $25 bond each year their child was in the school. The bond was payable in six years at 2% simple interest. Bonds were also sold outside the school to raise some of the initial capital. The school had six years to raise funds to pay off the first debts, and by the time the building mortgage was paid off (about twelve years later), had enough bond money left to build a storage shed. Many families donated their bonds to the school--six years later they hadn't missed the money but had remembered the good feelings they had about the school. The whole effort required a lot of paperwork and some good accounting practices, but it worked.

Financial Policies

If your parents pay tuition monthly, a good practice is to collect two months' tuition in September (first and last months'). This assures sufficient funds when they're most needed (at the beginning of the year) and discourages drop-outs, particularly if the money is not refundable after a

certain date. You must inform parents at the time you interview them for membership that they will pay two months' tuition in September--you don't spring it on them.

Application fees should be non-refundable except if the school does not enroll the child. They should not apply to tuition unless your school is rich. The better your school, the more you can charge. Fifteen dollars is a good maximum, and it doesn't pay to collect for less than $5. The fee serves the purpose of reimbursing the school for the time put in by the membership chairman and teacher in explaining the school to the parent.

As far as tuition refunds go, the policy should be stated in the by-laws. Allow the first month or six weeks of enrollment as a probationary period so that if the parent or the school feels the child will not benefit from the year or the mother is not able to participate as she should, the member can withdraw without penalty. If last month's tuition has been collected, it would be refunded.

Your by-laws might state that in case of prolonged or serious illness of the child or participating mother the child could be temporarily or permanently withdrawn with no further tuition due and a refund made. Since many relatively non-serious childhood diseases might require a child's absence of two school weeks, it's a good idea to define a minimum of one month as a lower limit when considering that option.

Now, what about a member withdrawing for other reasons--such as moving, or deciding she doesn't like the school. Your by-laws should require thirty days' written notice of withdrawal so that the school has a month to find a replacement. If there is less than thirty days' notice, any tuition paid in advance need not be refunded, although some schools will refund that money

if the child is immediately replaced. Some schools will not refund the last month's tuition at all after March 15, which is considered too late to enroll a new child. If thirty days' notice is given and it's early enough in the year, the fair policy is to refund any money even if the child is not replaced for two months or more.

Long-range Planning

Long-range planning is not just praying you get through this school year but relates to the board's accepting responsibility for insuring the life of the co-op as an institution in the community.

That means knowing your community--is the population shifting; where will your enrollment come from in three years? in six years? If a major piece of equipment needs to be purchased or replaced in a year or so, what plans can you make now to begin to acquire the funds? You don't wait for next year's board to solve the problem if you're aware of it now. What changes should be made in the program? If a new philosophy needs to be evolved, the current board should begin to study and make recommendations. Maybe a board two years from now will make the decision based on some of the study your board has done. What is the need for another class? Could you extend your program to morning and afternoon or to more days per week? Can you help your teacher acquire additional training in the next year or two if she could benefit by it? What can you do to see that your school is visible in the community....that when a new family moves into the area and the mother asks her 50-year-old neighbor if she knows of any preschool programs, the neighbor says, "Oh, yes--there's a good one in such and such church--everyone's always talking about it." How can your school work with the local public schools? It's great to have the support of the public schools--but

what can you offer them? Perhaps some of your mothers, all of whom have been trained as classroom assistants through your parent education program, would volunteer as classroom aides--either during the year their children are in preschool or when they are enrolled in kindergarten. Some of your mothers might speak to PTA groups on co-ops.

As part of your school's long-range planning, you should consider what you can do for other children and for other co-ops. For instance, when you have completed your job on the board next spring, how will you use the knowledge and experience you've gained? Consider working with your local council in whatever capacity is appropriate. Councils all over the United States and Canada are involved in activities from publishing books to sponsoring community-wide conferences to testifying on state and national legislation. When your school is called to provide a council board member or to spearhead a special project, you will be assuring your own school's viability if you accept. Don't limit your sights to just what's happening in your school's backyard.

If you remember the definition of parent education cited earlier, it included that which makes parents aware of what's going on in the field of early childhood education and that which helps them develop as informed members of society. That means you and your membership should keep yourselves informed of what's going on politically for children. That's part of your school's long-range planning. Do you know what Federal and/or local legislation exists or is pending that impacts on your children? It may not relate to your own children, but if it relates to the children with whom your children will be growing up, if it relates to those who will be sharing the same public school services and resources, if it relates to those who will be taking their places

alongside your children as citizens of the community, then it merits your attention. To the extent you show concern for other children in your community, your own children ultimately will benefit.

Isn't that <u>really</u> why you chose a co-op?

APPENDIX A

Simplified Rules of Order

A motion is made in order for the group to act on an idea or to reach a decision. The member making the motion states it as clearly as possible: "I move that...." The secretary records the motion.

Another member seconds the motion. Motions may be seconded from the floor without official recognition by the chairman.

Once the motion has been seconded, the floor is open to discussion. The discussion need not be recorded by the secretary, although unresolved questions or items for future discussion should be noted.

If a member wishes to amend the motion, she does so after the original motion has been seconded. She says: "I move to amend the motion by...." Another member seconds the amendment. The secretary records the amendment. The amendment is voted upon before the motion.

In the discussion of a motion or amendment, the chairman may allow members who wish to speak more than once to do so, particularly if the discussion has not consumed the entire time that has been allotted to it. However, the member who has made the motion has the right to ask that her motion be voted upon when everyone who wishes to has spoken once. She says, "I call for the question" or "There is a question before the house."

The chairman cannot entertain a new motion until a decision has been made on the original motion and any amendments to it. If during the discussion it becomes apparent that the motion is unsuitable, the member who introduced it may ask that it be withdrawn. Any amendments must also be withdrawn. If the motion is not withdrawn, it must be voted down before a substitute motion can be introduced.

The chairman conducts the vote by saying: "All in favor of the motion signify by.... (saying 'aye', raising your hand, etc.)." The results of the voting are recorded by the secretary: "motion passed" or "motion defeated."

APPENDIX B

Real Life Solutions

1. This was discussed directly with the teacher since she was in the best position to explain why it was part of her program. Her response to the parent was that she wanted the children to be able to distinguish differences and similarities. On this day the children were talking about differences in gender, on the next day they would be counting children according to eye color, then they would count by hair color and so on. Because she had an explanation, the teacher did not become defensive when questioned, and the parent saw the validity of the explanation.
2. This was brought to the board and the director because it was a significant concern relating to an employee's ability to function on the job. The board was involved as the employer; the director was involved as the teacher's direct supervisor. The president and the director then discussed the problem with the teacher.
3. This issue was taken up with the director as educational head of the school. If the teacher truly was not providing adequate science experiences, she might have become defensive when confronted by the parents, and the question then would become one of who has the greater expertise in preschool programming - the teacher or the parents? By approaching the director, the parents were able to air their views without feeling that <u>they</u> must suggest specific activities to the teacher. The director was able to assist the teacher, through what both perceived as a helping relationship, in incorporating science into the program.
4. This situation was brought to the teacher since she observed the children daily and was primarily responsible for managing their behavior at school.

Again, because the director and teacher enjoyed a comfortable relationship, the teacher was able to ask the director to observe the children and offer suggestions.

APPENDIX C

Sample Teacher Application

I. Personal Data:

Name _____ Age _____

Address _____ Phone _____

II. Education:

Degree _____ Date Granted _____

College or University _____

Major Subject _____

Other appropriate course work _____

_____

_____

III. Employment Experience:

Employer _____
name and address

Dates _____

Position _____

Reason for leaving _____

Salary _____

Employer _____
name and address

Dates _____

Position _____

Reason for leaving _____

Salary _____

IV. Volunteer Experience:

V. Professional References:

Name and Position _____

Address _____

Name and Position _____

Address _____

APPENDIX D

Sample Director Contract

I. Parties
This agreement entered into by the __school_____ and __director___, employer and employee respectively, shall be a contract of employment for the school year 19___ to 19___, subject to the constitution of the school. This contract binds only the school and no officer or member of the school may be held personally liable thereunder.

II. Duties
The director will oversee the educational program of the school, and teach the _____ year old class.

The director will hold _____ individual parent conferences per year.

The director will attend all membership meetings, attend board meetings at the invitation of the board, and meet as necessary with the board's representative.

The director will attend and direct staff meetings.

The director will attend membership interviews and visit each child in his home prior to the beginning of the school year.

III. School Year
The school year shall commence September _____ and end June ____.

IV. Salary
The salary for the term of this contract shall be $_____ per year payable in nine equal payments on the _____ of each month. It is understood that this salary is for teaching during the school year plus reimbursement for the time spent in interviewing and home visits.

V. Hours
The school session shall be from _____ to _____, Monday through Friday. The teacher shall be at school early enough to set up activities before the children arrive and remain to close up the school.

VI. Holidays
Holidays shall correspond to those in effect in the __local community__ Public Schools.

VII. Professional Leave
The employee shall be entitled to leave with pay for each of the following:
_____ days per year for attendance at workshops or professional meetings
_____ days per year for observation at other schools

VIII. Other Leave

The employee shall be entitled to _____ days of sick leave per year which may be accumulated from year to year up to a maximum equal to _____ years' sick leave.

The employee shall be entitled to _____ days per year of emergency leave which is non-cumulative.

IX. Termination

This agreement may be terminated by either party on thirty days' written notice.

President _____ Date _____

Teacher _____ Date _____

APPENDIX E

Suggested Readings

This bibliography is divided into three categories: materials that are of special interest to parents in cooperatives; books that are of general interest in the broad area of child development, and those that relate directly to nursery school philosophies, programs, and curriculum. Every parent education library should have selections from each category along with a list of other books to encourage in-depth study in areas of specific interest.

I. For and About Cooperative Nursery Schools

The Bowen Nursery School, Inc., Parent and School: A New Beginning (A Comprehensive Guide for Community Nursery Schools). 280 Cypress Street, Newton Centre, Mass. 02159.

The Montgomery County Council of Cooperative Nursery Schools, Cooperative Nursery Schools: A Handbook for Parents. 504 Royalton Rd., Silver Spring, Md. 20901.

Parent Cooperative Preschools International, "Reaching Parents" series: The How's and Why's, Parent Programming and Workshop Planning, Effective Discussions, How to Start a Parent Cooperative Program. These materials as well as subscriptions to the Parent Cooperative Preschools International Journal are available from:

PCPI
20551 Lakeshore Road
Baie d'Urfe
Quebec, Canada

Katherine W. Taylor, Parents and Children Learn Together (Teachers College Press).

II. Child Development

Bruno Bettelheim, Dialogues With Mothers (Free Press)

Stella Chess et al, Your Child Is a Person (Viking Press)

Joseph Church & L. Joseph Stone, Childhood and Adolescence (Random)

Rudolph Dreikurs, Children: The Challenge (Duell, Sloan & Pearce)

Selma Fraiberg, The Magic Years (Scribner)

Haim Ginott, Between Parent and Child (Macmillan)

II. Child Development (cont'd)

Thomas Gordon, Parent Effectiveness Training

James L. Hymes, The Child Under Six (Prentice-Hall)

Paul Mussen, J. Conger, J. Kagan, Child Development: Personality (Harper & Row)

A. S. Neill, Summerhill - A Radical Approach to Child Rearing (Hart)

III. Nursery School Philosophies, Programs, Methods & Materials

Jerome Bruner, The Process of Education (Random House)

Joe L. Frost, Early Childhood Education Rediscovered: Readings (Holt, Reinhardt & Winston)

James L. Hymes, Teaching the Child Under Six (Merrill)

Sarah Lou Leeper et al, Good Schools for Young Children (Macmillan)

Eda LeShan, Conspiracy Against Childhood (Atheneum)

Maya Pines, Revolution in Learning: The Years From Birth to Six

Note: The LeShan and Pines books take opposing stands on the same issue. Don't read one without the other!

Evelyn G. Pitcher et al, Helping Young Children Learn (Merrill)

Katherine Read, The Nursery School (W.B. Saunders)

Margaret A. Stant, The Young Child: His Activities & Materials (Prentice-Hall)

Elizabeth D. Tarnay, What Does the Nursery School Teacher Teach? (NAEYC)

Center for Human Services

2084 CORNELL ROAD / CLEVELAND, OHIO 44106 / (216) 421-7880

Additional copies of this book may be ordered from the Community Consultation Service at the above address. Please enclose check or money order in the amount of $3.50 per copy payable to "Center for Human Services".